

## **Exploring the “unity” of the virtues: The case of an allocentric quintet**

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### **Abstract**

This paper has two interrelated aims. First we explore a novel conceptual analysis of the “unity” of the virtues. Virtues come in clusters differentiated by broad functions within overall character. We identify three such clusters — virtues of intelligent caring, virtues of willpower, and virtues of humility. Virtues within a cluster are “unified” by some commonality, e.g. justice, compassion, and truthfulness all are kinds of intelligent caring. The allocentric virtues, a sub-class of virtues of intelligent caring, are forms of intelligent caring *about people*. Virtues of willpower are capacities to manage impulses: desires, emotions, and habits. Virtues of humility are absences of vices of pride. These clusters support and exploit one another in a healthy character. Second, we explore whether empirical psychology can support conceptual analysis such as we propose. Our discussion of the conceptual analysis and empirical studies of the relations between pairs of allocentric virtues illustrates this exploration.

Keywords: Virtues, unity of virtues, gratitude, compassion, humility, forgiveness, generosity

## Introduction

How are virtues connected with one another, and how are inquirers to approach this question for maximum precision and plausibility? We will propose a version of the “unity” of the virtues thesis that involves dividing them into at least three types. Acknowledging this division, as well as subdivisions within it, allows a more nuanced account of the interconnections and their strength than traditional accounts of the unity of the virtues. We will propose, as well, a coordination of conceptual analysis and empirical investigation as maximizing our understanding of virtues’ interconnections. After a general sketch of the interconnections of virtues, we will illustrate this point and sketch our approach to the inquiry with an analysis of an allocentric quintet of generosity, forgivingness, compassion, gratitude and humility (section 2).

## The unity of the virtues

Socrates taught that “virtue is one” (Plato, 1997, *Protagoras* 329d and following). By this he apparently meant that there is literally only one virtue, though it goes by different names—“justice,” “courage,” “temperance,” “wisdom,” and so forth. If these words refer to

parts of Virtue, the “parts” are not distinct, because justice is pious and piety just, and so forth for all pairs of “parts.” This is the strongest possible version of the “unity of virtue” thesis. For a defense, see Penner (1973).

A weaker view is that virtues logically entail one another: you cannot have courage without being just, nor justice without having courage, and so forth for all pairs of virtues. Here the traits are not all the *same* trait, but no virtue is *separable* from any of the others. This view has been attributed to Aristotle. His rationale is that each of the virtues requires practical wisdom (*Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13, 1145a1–2). We might explain his view as follows. If situations divided up neatly into ones that call for justice, ones that call for compassion, ones that call for courage, and so forth, then it would be possible to have the practical wisdom that goes with one of the virtues while lacking the practical wisdom that goes with some others. But life-situations are not like that. The same situation that calls for justice may call also for courage, or compassion. So the virtues overlap in their relevance to situations. If so, then to be consistently just, a person will have to have the aspects of wisdom that go with compassion and courage, and so forth for all the moral virtues. But one cannot be wise in respect of any virtue without actually having that virtue. So a person cannot have any moral virtue without having all the moral virtues. For a sympathetic but critical discussion of this Aristotelian view, see Wolf (2007).

Aristotle's view depends on the premise that each distinct virtue requires practical wisdom, and that the virtues are all similar in that respect. Wolf (2007) illustrates this assumption in her treatment of Aristotle's view. We think that this assumption is questionable. While courage does require that persons be sensible about how to achieve what they want in risky situations, and that they have some skills of fear-management, it seems clear that some very courageous people are not notably wise. They sometimes use their considerable courage for unwise purposes. They contrast, in this way, with highly just people; for a person cannot be deeply just without being notably wise. If this is right, then virtues do not generally entail one another, and the Aristotelian view is not in all regards correct.

In the remainder of this section we will propose another construal of the "unity" of the virtues. Our brief account can at best be only a sketch, a broad outline of some of the main kinds of virtues in their structural interlocking. Proper pride, temperance, and a sense of humor will, for example, be left untouched. Our account will be organic in a broad sense. Just as a human body has parts whose differences from one another are essential to their distinctive functional contributions to the whole body's wellbeing and functioning, so a moral character has aspects which, in themselves, differ significantly from one another, and whose differences are essential to their contributions to overall character. Just as the organs of a body depend for their functions on other organs in the same body (for example, the right

and left hands depending on each other in many tasks, and all other organs depending on the heart and lungs), so, for example, courage depends on justice and compassion for proper motivation of courageous action in many circumstances, and justice and compassion can depend, in a different way, on courage. Such interdependencies constitute the organic connections of virtues to one another. Thus to understand the “unity” of the virtues is to reckon both with *differences* among the types of virtues and with the consequent differential *functions* by which they can *interact*.

Three main types of good character traits are the *virtues of intelligent caring* (such as justice, truthfulness, compassion, generosity, and gratitude), the *virtues of willpower* (such as self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience), and the *virtue(s) of humility* (such as being unpretentious, unassuming, gentle, unsnobbish, and properly deferential). These clusters of virtues are like types of organs in a body. Types of organs constitute interrelated systems (hands, feet, legs and arms; digestive; circulatory; etc.), and these systems constitute the larger system that is the body.

Roberts (1984) distinguishes substantive-motivational virtues such as justice, generosity, compassion, the sense of duty, and truthfulness from virtues of willpower such as courage, perseverance, self-control, and patience (Adams 2006, calls this latter kind of virtue “structural”, pp. 33–4). Subsequently in this paper we will use ‘virtues of intelligent

caring' for what Roberts calls 'substantive-motivational.' The virtues of intelligent caring are substantive in reflecting the actual substance of morality, broadly speaking: they embody rules of fair play, helpfulness to those in need, the criteria of justice in their several forms, the concept of duty, and the intrinsic values of truth. They are "motivational" because they supply moral concern: to be just, for example, is to *care* about other people's rights. At the core of each of the virtues of this class is a concern for a conceptually determinate object—justice, truth, human wellbeing in one or another regard, etc. People differ in the strength of their concern for such things, but they also differ in their particular understanding of the object. To be concerned about something is necessarily to understand it in some way. Different people who care about justice may have diverse understandings of it, more or less nuanced (rigid), universal (tribally limited), or specialized (racial justice, justice in war). One whose concern for justice is a *virtue* of justice will have to have an *excellent* or *intelligent* understanding of justice—deep, flexible, accurate, universal, etc. Such understanding is a part of wisdom in justice. Insofar as the wisdom is practical, it will also involve understanding how to implement and promote justice, a particular set of social skills. We could sketch a similar account of the other virtues whose core is a concern and involve an intelligent understanding of their objects.

Aristotle's point about virtues' overlapping relevance to situations is also pertinent. Justice bears an obvious relation to truth, and thus to truthfulness; similarly, it bears significantly on human suffering, and therefore on human affairs that concern compassion. The most perfectly just person will need to be truthful and compassionate, and to understand justice and human suffering and wellbeing in such a way as to know when justice considerations trump compassion considerations and vice-versa. We can see, then, that the virtues of intelligent caring are pretty well "unified," especially if we think of the most perfect exemplifications of them. We allow that a person can have a virtue without being a perfect exemplar of it; given human nature, it would be unrealistic to impose such a high standard. And the imperfection of a very just person might well be located at her shortfall in one or more of the other virtues of intelligent caring.

In a later section we will consider in more detail the "unity" of the virtues that make up 'the allocentric quintet': generosity, gratitude, forgivingness, compassion, and humility. Our discussion will present a test case for our more general account of the "unity" of the virtues, and also massage the question whether empirical studies of the virtues can contribute to our understanding of their "unity." We say 'allocentric' to suggest that these virtues essentially involve a focus on other people, in particular, an *intelligent caring* about them. This will make the quintet a sub-class of the virtues of intelligent caring. They constitute a sub-class



because not all virtues of caring take other *people* as their objects. Truthfulness, for example, is a caring about truth, while the sense of duty is a caring about duty and justice a caring about just states of affairs, institutions, etc. We should note that humility is a guest member of the quintet. But for reasons that we'll consider momentarily, it plays very well with the other members, liberating them from characteristic impediments.

The virtues of willpower are a different kind of ethical organ. They are powers of self-management that can be activated by moral considerations, but also by others. A just person will need to be courageous where justice, compassion, or truthfulness requires facing threats, but, as the person who displays courage in rescuing his property from a burning house shows, the capacity to face known threats without discombobulation requires neither 1) that the agent be unconflicted, nor 2) that his end be supplied by any of the main virtues of caring. He may just want to rescue his property, and courage will come in handy.

Our proposal faces objections on both fronts. Some feel that only moral dispositions merit the name of virtue, implying that courage not deployed in the service of moral ends is not a virtue. But this seems to be a modern prejudice. Aristotle agrees that moral ends are not the only ones that courage can serve when he says that fully courageous acts are “for the sake of the noble” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.7; hereafter *NE*). See Roochnik (2015, pp. 200–218) for an argument that Aristotle's courageous person is not motivated by what we would call

moral considerations, but by the aim to be and remain a beautiful, honourable, soul. But we go further: courage can be exhibited even in actions not for the sake of the noble—for example, for the sake of rescuing one's property from a fire. Nor does it require that courage involve no motivational conflict: we say that the ability to stand up to fear with rational self-possession is a virtue: it is both admirable and very useful.

Aristotle supports the first objection to our view—that courage rules out conflict. If courage is a virtue, thinks Aristotle, it doesn't *overcome* fear; it is just a matter of fearing the right thing, for the right reason, for the right length of time, etc. (*NE* 3.7). The ability to overcome impulses is not virtue, but *continence*. That an impulse *needs* to be overcome shows a deficiency of virtue. This may seem paradoxical: isn't fear by its very nature aversive—pushing the agent *away from* the threat, and therefore, in the case of acting in the face of fear, an impulse or conative pressure *away from* performing the appropriate or desired action? And if so, wouldn't courage, as a disposition to perform intentional actions in the context of felt threats, *have* to have an element of managing an impulse (where the part of the “self” that is managed is the fearing self)?

Consider also perseverance. Perseverance seems to be a different kind of disposition from a concern defined by an object of concern. It seems to be fundamentally an ability rather than a concern. True, to persevere in a task requires caring about *something*—winning a prize,

becoming a first-rate psychologist—but there is no particular kind of task one needs to care about; perseverance can even serve evil goals. It is the ability not to give up in psychological adversity like anxiety, discouragement, or the skepticism of companions. The perseverant person need not depend entirely on the continuity of her interest in or enthusiasm for a project—a dissertation, a marriage, a job; she has some mastery of her attention span.

This ability will consist partly in self-management skills, partly in a kind of psychological muscle for resisting impulses contrary to one's more fundamental goals (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Baumeister and Tierney (2011) call it “willpower,” and seem to show that it can be strengthened with exercise, as James (1981) said. Most likely, perseverance combines these things, but in any case it is an ability, contrasting with the virtues of intelligent caring, which are ways of caring. Their relation seems to be this: our concerns set our goals; perseverance is often needed and (most likely) develops in the pursuit of goals.

Aristotle calls the disposition that regularly overcomes adverse impulses, not “virtue,” but “continence” (*enkrateia*, or strength) and the disposition that regularly fails to do so not vice, but “incontinence” (*akrasia*, or weakness) (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 7, chapters 1–10). We think it is natural to think of such strength in self-command as a human excellence, indeed an impressive achievement deserving the name of virtue, and we are not

alone in the history of moral psychology in thinking so. Immanuel Kant is perhaps the thinker who first comes to mind: for him, *all* virtue is the strength to resist impulses:

*Virtue* is the strength of a human being's maxim in fulfilling his duty. Strength of any kind can be recognised only by the obstacles it can overcome; and in the case of virtue these obstacles are natural inclinations, which can come into conflict with the human being's moral resolution (Kant, 1996, pp. 524–5, italics original).

(Note that Kant calls strength of will 'virtue' only when it subserves the sense of moral duty; thus he disagrees with us on this point.) But after Aristotle and before Kant, thinkers such as the apostle Paul (Galatians 5.22) and Cicero (*de Officiis* 1.67–8) thought so too.

Furthermore, to the extent that the self-management virtues depend on sophisticated reflexive cognition, they are characteristically *human* virtues that distinguish us from all but the brainiest of the other animals (and possibly even from them). Also, we think that the division of these virtues from the properly moral virtues is a natural one for psychologists, who certainly do not limit the training they offer in "self-regulation" to moral applications, yet consider the powers so gained as contributing something good and essentially human to their subjects' repertoire of dispositions, something required for living a good life—a very Aristotelian criterion for virtue. William James once advised us who wish to master ourselves

to “do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test” (James, 1981, p. 126). So we propose the virtues of willpower as one main cluster or system.

So far, we have distinguished two main groups of virtues, the virtues of intelligent caring and the virtues of willpower. We think humility, which we are treating as a guest member of our allocentric quintet, fits in neither of these two classes. We think that any time a person performs a humble action, or expresses humility by way of an emotional state (e.g. joy in another person’s triumph) or lack thereof (e.g. defensiveness), the motivation comes from somewhere other than humility—say, from one of the allocentric virtues, or the sense of justice, or the love of truth. Humility, as such, seems not to be a source of motivation; but equally, it isn’t a kind of self-control. One can summon self-control in the service of humility—try to be humble when one is having vain or arrogant impulses; but to *be* humble is not to need to try.

Traditionally, humility has been thought of as the contrary of pride, where pride is thought of as a dysfunctionally inflated self-concept or concern for an inappropriate kind of personal importance (what one psychologist has called ‘narcissistic enhancement’ Reimer 2009, p. 75). Accordingly, we have focused on such “vices” of pride as arrogance, vanity,

hyper-autonomy, domination, snobbery, envy, and various vices of tribal superiority such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. We say a person who had none of these defects, but was otherwise mentally healthy or virtuous, would be humble (see Roberts, 2017), and a person who lacks one of the vices of pride would have the corresponding virtue of humility. Thus we can explain why humility supplies no motive or self-management ability, yet is a virtue.

Some are uncomfortable with the proposal that a *virtue* might consist in the absence of a certain kind of vice. A virtue, they feel, must be “positive”—“the absence of something negative does not necessarily imply the presence of something positive. Thus, humility [as something “positive”] is not just the absence of [such “negative” things as] narcissism, conceit, or arrogance” (Tangney, 2005). This principle runs against much of our everyday experience. Most people think it is a very good and “positive” thing to be without the AIDS virus. Of course, health with respect to the AIDS virus is not *just* its absence; the body in which the virus is absent needs to be functioning properly. But the situation is analogous with humility as an absence of the vices of pride. One who has good character in lacking these vices will have a number of other virtues that are *not* just an absence of something, but a well-formed concern or a well-developed ability. The lack of the vices of pride is just one aspect of good character, but it is a very important aspect, given the havoc that the vices of pride can play in a person’s moral life. It is the characteristic havoc played in so many human

lives by arrogance, vanity, domination, hyper-autonomy, self-righteousness, snobbery, selfish ambition, and other vices of pride that warrants making humility a major functional aspect of good moral character. Other “virtuous” absences are purity in water (nothing but the absence of pollutants) and openings in walls (nothing but stretches where the wall is absent).

Let us summarize our general sketch of the “unity” of virtues. We have distinguished three kinds of virtues. Each makes a distinctive contribution to the life of virtue. The virtues of intelligent caring provide motivation to action and the concerns that are basic to the moral emotions, and embody the major conceptual content (“rules,” “principles,” “wisdom”) of the ethical life—concepts of justice, wellbeing, suffering and deficiency, duty, etc. The virtues of willpower are powers of self-management, composed of both strengths and skills. To the extent that the skills involve strategies, they too have some conceptual content, and thus “wisdom.” The virtues of willpower support the virtues of intelligent caring by supplying resistance to impeding factors such as fear, selfishness, lust, discouragement, the impulses of the vices of pride, and maladaptive habits. Humility is the absence of the concerns that we have called the vices of pride (with their understanding of life, which is an opposite of wisdom), thus a kind of freedom or purity. The virtues of willpower can provide a partial substitute for humility, in offering a resource for resisting the vices of pride such as envy,

snobbishness, and vanity, partly by managing their emotional outputs. The virtues of intelligent caring supply virtuous rationales and motivation for the exercise of the virtues of willpower. They support humility by providing motivations that are incompatible with, or at least offer friction against, the concerns of the vices of pride, so that growth in the virtues of intelligent caring is at the same time a diminishing of the vices of pride (thus an increase of humility). Humility fosters the virtues of intelligent caring by the elimination of ego-pollution, and serves the virtues of willpower by allowing mental clarity about the need to deploy them, and clarity of motivation to do so, clarity that may be obscured by the vices of pride.

#### Another approach to virtue clusters

We have identified clusters of virtues based on conceptual arguments about resemblances among virtues within a cluster, differences from virtues of other clusters, and distinct functions. An alternative approach to clustering is offered by the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), formerly the "Values in Action Inventory" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This measure, consisting of 240 Likert scale items was designed to identify an individual's profile of character strengths based on Peterson and Seligman's classification. They proposed



a taxonomy consisting of six overarching, culturally ubiquitous “virtues” (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence), exemplified in twenty-four character strengths. Peterson and Seligman (2004) put forward the view that strengths and virtues are hierarchically related domains, with character strengths representing more specific instantiations of the general principles of virtue. For instance, within the higher-order “virtue” category of courage, Peterson and Seligman (2004) locate four character strengths of bravery, perseverance, honesty and “zest”. On our schema, bravery and perseverance belong together as virtues of willpower, but honesty is a kind of truthfulness with links to justice, and therefore a virtue of intelligent caring.

They also proposed a temperance cluster, which encompasses forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-control. Again, the cluster seems malformed by conceptual standards: following millennia of tradition we make prudence practical wisdom (the intelligence in intelligent caring), which we think of as distributed throughout the virtues of intelligent caring: it is the concerned understanding of justice, truthfulness, and other moral matters. Disputes and discussions about virtue categories are not new, but what is relatively novel is the validation of such classifications by factor analysis of the VIA (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Space will not permit a full review of extant factor analyses of the VIA. However, it is noteworthy that *none* of the studies conducted to date have corroborated a six factor solution that would support the original categorisation of the VIA taxonomy. Solutions across different samples have been mutually inconsistent. Macdonald, Bore and Munro (2008) report that the 24 character strengths of the VIA were well represented in both a four-factor and even a one-factor solution that speaks to Aristotle's "logical entailment" position. Shryack, Steger, Krueger and Kallie (2010), suggest that either a three-factor or four-factor solution best fits the data in an adult sample, while McGrath, Greenberg and Hall-Simmonds (in press) identify the same three factors across a dozen adult samples, which they label "caring," "inquisitiveness," and "self-control," echoing the earlier findings of McGrath (2015). McGrath and Walker (2016) report a four-factor solution in youths aged 10–17, consisting of intellectual strengths, strengths of self-control, and two interpersonal factors reflecting general engagement and "other-directedness."

Thus the conceptual differentiation between virtues of willpower and the allocentric, or perhaps more broadly, the virtues of intelligent caring, finds some synergy here. McGrath et al. (in press) and McGrath and Walker (2016) found a factor they labelled "self-control" in adult and youth samples respectively, while McGrath et al.'s (in press) "caring" and

McGrath and Walker's (2016) "other-directedness" factors seem to describe similar qualities in adults and youth.

We bring factor analysis into consideration, not to provide support for our allocentric quintet (though the existing factor analyses do consistently show character strengths of the VIA loading onto separate self-control and "other-focused" factors that echo our distinction), but to illustrate that "virtue clustering" can be conceived and examined in diverse ways. Clusters may be based on theorized relations of family resemblance, interdependence, and exclusion (as we propose here). These can be compared with empirically-derived clusters based on mathematical relationships among questionnaire items (as with factor analysis and principal components analysis). Depending on how adequately one believes questionnaire items tap the constructs being measured, factor analyses could challenge existing theoretically derived categorisations of virtues—for instance, the six overarching virtues of the VIA that have singularly failed to emerge in any factor analysis.

Current accounts of empirically-derived "virtue clustering," achieved *post hoc* by means of factor analysis of VIA items, are germane to the current paper, for they shed light on other (*viz.*, mathematical) means of grouping virtues. However, the method is limited by the adequacy of questionnaire items designed to tap the virtue constructs, which in turn depends on the conceptual sophistication of those who formulate the items. Furthermore, the

form (rather than the content) of those items can affect the correlations. For example, negatively worded items across a whole range of questionnaire items frequently load together. Thus, while factor analyses may complement conceptual theorising—offering a means of checking initial intuitions—they do not replace a more conceptual *a priori* approach, because they are blind to the underlying reasons for such clustering.

We also need an understanding of conceptual relationships that goes deeper than purely mathematical relationships among questionnaire items—the “correlation matrix” of factor analysis. We need an understanding of relationships of similarity, difference, causation, support, and exclusion among traits. The starting point of this endeavor is a careful analysis of conceptual relationships, but we think such analysis might then be augmented by experimental studies that attempt to demonstrate causal and correlational relations among traits. For example, an experimental intervention might show that promoting compassion also fosters gratitude.

Such studies are neither necessary nor sufficient to establish these relationships, and we highlight limitations in the methods of such studies (see below). But this kind of approach affords a different and more robust corroboration of the putative relationships than mere factor analyses of questionnaires. We do not believe conceptual analysis should be subordinated to this method—that it stands or falls with the approach—but rather, that it offers

a way of linking conceptual analysis of the relationships among virtues to empirical research that speaks to the relationships.

We are not aware of research linking conceptual theorising with experimental studies of one virtue reinforcing another. However, we submit that it would be an interesting angle for future research, especially since factor analyses of the VIA have tended to identify an “intellectual/inquisitiveness” cluster and a “self-control” cluster, alongside a virtue constellation representing “caring” or “other-directedness” (McGrath et al., in press; McGrath and Walker, 2016). We turn now to a somewhat more fine-grained discussion of the interrelations among virtues belonging to a sub-type of the virtues of intelligent caring. These virtues might also be called virtues of benevolence.

#### An allocentric quintet

The members of the allocentric quintet are compassion, generosity, gratitude, forgivingness, and a guest member, humility. The first four are dispositions to care about other people for their sake: to care about their health, happiness, safety, pleasure, comfort, or prospects—their wellbeing very broadly conceived. They form a sub-group within the larger

class of virtues of intelligent caring. They are “unified,” to this extent, by the commonality of their orientation to their objects: They are all kinds of benevolence.

Their orientation *for the sake of the other* is not meant to exclude reference to the self of the agent who possesses them; rather, the virtues we have in mind are also self-referential and radically egalitarian: it is *I am for you as you were / are / would be / for me*. In other words, benevolence rules out depreciation of the other vis-à-vis self. The self-reference is clearest in the cases of gratitude and forgivingness, which are often (though not always) instantiated as gratitude for a benefit received *by the subject himself*, and forgiveness of an offense *against the subject himself* (Roberts, 2015, pp. 890–91; Pettigrove, 2012). But it is also elemental to the generosity and full respectfulness of these virtues that the other is generously seen in his or her full agency, and not, in truncation, as a “patient” to / on whom I act as the only full “agent” in the dyad (see Vanier, 1997, pp. 77, 109, 112). The rich philanthropist for whom the import of his liberality is that he overflows to these inferior, needy ones is not authentically generous toward those to whom he gives, because he is subtly using them for his self-aggrandizement. To highlight a second point to distinguish our concept of allocentricity, we note that Triandis, Leung, Villareal and Clack (1985) use “allocentric” to refer to individuals who manifest, at the level of *personality*, tendencies associated with the collectivist pole of individualist-collectivist *societies*—that is to say,

giving priority to in-group goals (family, tribe or nation) and following group norms. Clearly, we are not using the term this way.

Humility is not itself allocentric, but because the “other”-orientation of the properly allocentric virtues *requires* some degree of humility, and because they tend to promote it. The vices of pride are all forms of self-centeredness that block or disturb the connection to others that characterize the allocentric virtues. Humility, as the absence of these vices, aids allocentricity by being an unblockage of that connection.

The allocentric virtues are connected to the virtues of willpower by a kind of situational dependency. Benevolence felt and practiced under conditions of threat may require courage. Sustaining a forgiving attitude may require perseverance if the offender persists in offending or is lukewarm in repentance.

The virtues within any of the three kinds that we have surveyed are connected to others within the same kind by commonalities, and with virtues of other kinds by connections of dependence and enhancement. The four properly allocentric virtues, for example, are all forms of benevolence, and differentiated by the way the benevolence is expressed and directed: generosity is benevolence expressed in giving (goods, time, the benefit of a doubt), compassion is benevolence toward sufferers, gratitude is benevolence toward benefactors,

forgiveness is benevolence toward offenders. These various forms of benevolence face somewhat different difficulties and involve different construals of the one toward whom benevolence is felt and practiced, but they are connected to each other by a common person-oriented well-wishing and well-doing. Compassion may precipitate (or “*cause*”) forgiveness and forgiveness compassion. Generosity may take the form of compassionate action. These connections are due to the two virtues’ both being kinds of benevolence. We could consider each member of the quintet in relation to each other member, but for lack of pages and fear that such cranking analysis would be tedious, we will just consider generosity in its connections to each of the other virtues. For each pair we will follow a bit of conceptual analysis with a critical review of the relevant empirical literature.

### *Generosity and Gratitude*

Gratitude and generosity are conceptually reciprocal in the sense that gratitude is a virtuous response to perceived generosity, and the ideally generous giver is gratified by the grateful response. The recipient sees the gift as expressing the giver’s well-wishing, and the giver sees the recipient as acknowledging the goodness of the gift and of the giver’s good will. Furthermore, the grateful person is generous in feeling grateful and in giving tokens of



gratitude. The generosity of gratitude is evidenced in the free, frank, and happy “return” of a token for the benefactor’s benevolence and gift. In betokening the grateful good will of the beneficiary, the token is a “gift” to the benefactor. These logical reciprocities suggest that people with the virtues of gratitude and generosity will feel a happy bond with one another, a bond that is disrupted or diminished by evidences of stinginess and ingratitude.

We are not denying that people sometimes feel gratitude in situations that lack a generous benefactor, or that people can behave “generously” without being gratified by expressions of gratitude. People can be mistaken in their gratitude, and so-called generous behavior can be motivated in many ways that don’t conform to the virtue of generosity. Our remarks are about the *virtues* of gratitude and generosity.

Our remarks also suggest the empirical hypothesis that these virtues will reinforce one another: the generous person will respond to the beneficiary’s gratitude with deepened generosity, and the grateful person will feel the more grateful for the generous person’s joy in the grateful person’s return of thanks. Since these dispositions are virtues, not just relationships between particular persons (in, say, the manner of friendship), we can expect this pattern of reinforcement to bear fruit beyond the particular relationship. Grateful and generous persons will become more generous and grateful in other relationships.

Consistently with these conceptual remarks, Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) showed that a laboratory-induced state of gratitude led participants to help a person who had previously helped them, even when so doing carried a cost. Gratitude seems to have encouraged generous behavior. In a second study, they found that the effect of induced gratitude extended to behaving generously towards strangers who had not previously helped participants, in “upstream reciprocity.” This finding supports the thesis that grateful persons become more generous and grateful in relationships beyond the dyad of original benefactor and beneficiary.

However, this kind of “supporting evidence” for our analysis is subject to the familiar criticism that laboratory-induced states may poorly imitate real life. Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) brought about state gratitude as part of an elaborate manipulation that involved orchestrating three induced states (gratitude, amusement, and “neutral”). With the help of an experimental confederate, three scenarios were stage-managed after what participants believed was an experimental trial. In the gratitude condition, participants were led to believe that data from their computer-based trial had been lost. This was achieved by having the screen go blank—a result of the confederate secretly pulling the plug. When the confederate “recovered” the participant’s data, the subject was supposed (by the experimenter) to feel grateful.

This experiment raises questions. How do we know the subjects were grateful, rather than just relieved? How do we know they cared enough about the data to be distressed? How do we know they saw the confederate as benevolent toward them? How do we know that the experimental setting didn't induce a whole set of background assumptions in the minds of the subjects such that they depersonalized the situation and the confederate?

Empirical evidence for a “feedback loop” between gratitude and generosity witnessed in acts of purely reciprocal kindness is not surprising, though Exline, Lisan and Lisan (2012) found this was qualified by whether a kindness recalled in an experimental setting was “normative” (socially expected) or “non-normative.” Examples of non-normative kindness would be ones performed by a stranger or rival or supererogatorily, rather than by a loved one or as a fulfilment of duty. Exline et al. (2012) report that normative kindnesses yielded more positive emotion (such as gratitude and love) and less negative emotion (e.g. mistrust) than non-normative kindnesses, and led to participants' being more generous in giving money to charity.

It is unsurprising that non-trivial kindnesses of strangers may arouse suspicion, not gratitude (perhaps they are not seen as generous, but as ulteriorly motivated); this is consistent with our thesis of conceptual reciprocity. We more confidently impute motives to

loved ones than to strangers or rivals, and we expect loved ones to be benevolent. Furthermore, we are better prepared to feel bonded with those close to us.

Gulliford and Morgan (in press) report that participants in one empirical study described negative responses to a benefactor's generosity, such as a sense of indebtedness, guilt, awkwardness and embarrassment, which in some cases "soured" the experience of gratitude they reported. These findings echo features of gratitude that laypeople identified and rated as negative in an earlier prototype analysis of gratitude (Morgan, Gulliford, & Kristjánsson, 2014); but this finding too would be consistent with the reciprocity thesis, if we suppose that the "negative" feeling of indebtedness, etc. is not, after all, a kind of gratitude, and that the person who feels it doesn't see the "benefactor" as generous, but as burdensome.

Bear in mind, as well, that Exline et al. (2012), like Bartlett and deSteno (2006), relied on an induction method. They called on participants to recall a kindness conferred on them in the past to see whether this led to warmer affective reactions and to giving greater amounts of money to charity. A problem with induction studies of this sort is the presupposition that they accurately conjure the desired emotional or other state by recalling past experiences, imagining future experiences, or asking participants to engage in mood-congruent behaviors such as writing a gratitude letter (see Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2014 below). While manipulation checks can assess whether a given method has induced a state,

these states are temporary and may tell us little about a participant's enduring qualities. It would be a mistake to draw conclusions about long-standing character traits purely on the basis of an induced state. Some people may be more susceptible to such inductions than others, without this having any bearing on whether they have a corresponding deeper disposition. Stanislavskian actors get very good at self-inducing states characteristic of whatever character they happen to be playing (Stanislavski, 1936, 1989). Such states are thus relatively independent of the character of the individual actor. It also seems likely that people naturally vary in talent for self-inducing a variety of states.

While empirical research seems to support our analysis of reciprocity between the virtues of generosity and gratitude, inherent limitations in available methods raise doubts how much empirical studies ultimately buttress or corroborate conceptual analyses, particularly if inferences about virtues are drawn on the basis of temporarily induced states.

### *Generosity and Compassion*

Unlike generosity, compassion (Nussbaum, 2001) requires a perception of defect or suffering in the other: but many compassionate actions can count as generous as well. Both virtues dispose us to wishes that another person be advantaged or helped. The generous give

of their resources (time, treasure, attention) and the compassionate give aid to relieve suffering or defect that may require the same gifts. Where we would be unlikely to attribute compassion because the distress of the other is mild—the wine has run out, the host distressed, and I offer to run home and get some—we may attribute generosity. Compassion qualifies as generous when it is “costly” to the helper. Thus we have reason to expect an intervention that succeeds in making a person either more generous or more compassionate to tend also to make her more compassionate or generous. But because of compassion’s relation to suffering, a person with low tolerance for others’ distress may be generous without being very compassionate; so the causal influence should be stronger one way than the other.

That compassion and generosity are linked is at the heart of the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson & Leonard, 1987). We can assume that some degree of compassion gave rise to generosity in those studies where participants were given the opportunity to give money or time to a charitable cause (Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005; LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, & Willerton, 2012). Karremans et al (2005) focused specifically on the link between forgiveness and generosity (though forgiveness is itself a kind of generosity). Karremans, et al. (2005) found that asking participants to reflect on past actions of forgiving others (vs. past “unforgiveness”) increased the probability of donating money to and volunteering for charity; in other words, that causing a state of forgiveness gave rise to

a state of generosity. However, in addition to the problems regarding induction studies previously mentioned, using money as a dependent variable is also problematic. It will not have a consistent subjective value to all experimental participants. Moreover, it seems risky to assume that donors have been moved by compassion or forgiveness to act generously when they might have donated the money for some other reason. And using volunteering as a dependent measure is not without problems since, within the experimental context, the decision to volunteer could be strongly influenced by social desirability biases.

These studies offer some support for the mutual relationship between generosity and compassion, though we must acknowledge again that the kind of verification such empirical studies yield is subject to methodological limitations. While such studies seem to corroborate that the virtues of the quintet are interrelated and hence mutually reinforcing, the kind of support they offer is perhaps relatively weak given the inadequacies of the methods. By comparison, conceptual analysis offers a more detailed and conceptually diversified understanding. Nonetheless, the method at least attempts to marry conceptual concerns with empirical interests, and tries to offer some empirical substantiation of the theoretical connections among traits.

### *Generosity and Forgivingness*

In forgiveness, a person gives an offender a “gift”—something good that the offender does not deserve by the canons of strict justice. That good is above all good will, well wishing, and the cessation of hostility (Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Roberts, 1995; Pettigrove, 2012). We may think, therefore, that a person who is generally generous, wishing and working and “paying” (in money, time, or attention) for the wellbeing of others, will tend to be more forgiving than a stingy one or a person who always thinks in terms of and insists on strict justice. But note that the generosity must be genuinely allocentric; if it consists in “gift”-giving with an eye to reciprocity or exercising power over others, or getting credit for one’s well-doing, we have no reason to think that such an agent will also be a noteworthy forgiver.

The anger or resentment that marks situations calling for forgiveness adds a peculiar element. It seems likely that a person whose social thinking tends away from strict tit-for-tat justice and toward gracious giving will also think in such terms where offenses against himself or those he cares about are at issue. If forgiveness is a kind of generosity, it is a special kind, in which the potential selfish motive is not possessiveness (of goods or time, say), but retention of anger or resentment.



Studies show that forgiveness increases benevolence towards an offender but, as was the case with Bartlett and DeSteno's (2006) findings concerning gratitude, it *also* increases generosity towards other people. Karremans et al. (2005) demonstrated that the effects of forgiveness "spill over" beyond the relationship with the forgiven offender. As we saw in the previous section, Karremans et al. (2005) found that asking participants to reflect on past forgiveness (vs. past "unforgiveness") increased their probability of donating money to and volunteering for the charity, *Humanitas*. In much the same way as an induced state of gratitude promoted generosity (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006), an induced state of forgiveness apparently fostered two kinds of benevolence in giving (Karremans et al., 2005). Thus the empirical claim is that a state of forgiveness restores a "generalized pro-social orientation." The studies by Karremans et al. (2005) therefore empirically reinforce the case for the interrelations among the virtues of generosity and forgiveness. However, as we noted, the temporary state of forgiveness brought about in the study is a far cry from the trait of forgivingness –the enduring disposition to forgive other people over time. So the kind of support such a study affords for the analysis of the relations between the virtues of the allocentric quartet is perhaps best characterized as instructive and relevant, but imperfect.

### *Generosity and Humility*

As earlier noted, on our conception, humility is the absence of such vices as vanity, arrogance, and the other vices of pride (Roberts & Wood, 2007; Roberts, 2016). These vices are all ways of being concerned for (desiring or cherishing) a misconceived kind of personal “importance,” differing from one another in nuances of the misconception. Vain persons seek personal importance through self-display and conceive that importance as coming from people’s admiration, envy, awe, or fear of them; the arrogant find or seek their importance in entitlements and privileges, even abstracted from their rationales; the domineering get their supposed importance by throwing their weight around; and so forth. The concern for this pseudo-importance stands in stark contrast with wanting to be loved and having a secure and confident sense of oneself and one’s agency. For alternative conceptions of humility, see Flanagan (1990), Driver (2001), and Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr & Howard-Snyder (2015).

If we conceive generosity as fully allocentric, not just as a rational disposition to give goods away, it is easy to see generosity’s tension with the vices of pride. To the extent that a big donor donates for self-inflating reasons—to be adulated, to have a building named after her, to secure privileges—she is not generous. All the vices of self-importance place the self at center stage. Some of them are strongly social (anti-social). Consider vanity’s concern with others’ emotions, or self-righteousness’s insistence on comparisons. But they are socially antithetical to generosity. So these concerns need to be overturned if generosity is to flourish.

Humility is a kind of purity, a freedom from contamination by the vices of pride. No one is perfectly pure in this regard. If we made perfect humility the standard, none of us would be generous or humble. But generosity cannot prevail without some degree of humility's purity. If generosity requires some humility, then interventions that make someone more generous should also make her more humble. If someone can be brought to care genuinely about another's wellbeing, then to that extent, she will be unconcerned with her own pseudo-importance. Also, any intervention that increases someone's humility will open space in her outlook for generosity.

Exline and Hill (2012) found humility to be a consistent and robust predictor of generous behavior, while ruling out personality factors as mediators of the link (Big Five, self-esteem, entitlement, religiosity and social desirability). They also included a measure of gratitude in one study which, along with the personality measures, could not predict generosity better than humility. A possible explanation is that humility opens up allocentricity *generally*, whereas gratitude's effect is weaker because its target of generosity remains mainly the benefactor.

Like a number of studies referenced here, Exline and Hill (2012) used behavioural measures of generosity, which included the giving of charitable donations (see also Karremans et al., 2005). A problem with this metric is that it offers an assessment of only

one *kind* of generosity (monetary). In addition to giving participants a \$15 shopping voucher for completing the personality measures, Exline and Hill (2012) gave participants \$5 in \$1 bills expressly to give away, and while participants were free to decide how much they gave to charity, this expedient seems to stumble on the varying meaning of money to people, as previously noted. To tap another kind of generosity, Exline and Hill (2012) offered the same participants the opportunity to give additional time to the research by completing and mailing back post-study surveys. Humility scores predicted generous behaviour with both time and money. In a second study humility scores predicted the amount of money participants were willing to give to an anonymous future study participant, while a third demonstrated that humility correlated with participants' self-reported motives to be kind to others.

This trio of studies supports the hypothesis that generosity and humility are mutually reinforcing. However, they raise further thorny problems. First, how accurately do people self-report their motives to be kind? Second, how reliably and accurately do questionnaires created to tap humility achieve this end? The latter point applies equally to all psychometric assessments, but in Exline and Hill's (2012) study it is particularly pertinent since longer and shorter versions of humility scales were used across the three studies, causing a lack of consistency in operationalizing humility. Study 1 used a 21 item self-report measure, which was also used in Study 2. Study 3 made use of an expanded 36 item inventory.

The problem of self-report measures is a recurrent, familiar and serious limitation for empirical research. The first and most important question is whether such measures validly and reliably capture what they hope to measure (see Gulliford, Morgan & Kristjánsson, 2013). Many measures can be criticized for operationalizing concepts simplistically, reductively or inaccurately. The problem of conceptual sharpness affects reporter reliability. Self-deception, social-desirability biases and demand characteristics all affect the reliability of participant responses.

A number of attempts have been made to circumvent problems of self-report. For instance, LaBouff et al. (2012) buttressed explicit measures of humility with an attempt to measure humility implicitly, while Kruse et al. (2014) offered an assessment of state humility based on judges' coding of thank you letters written to induce gratitude in the study.

While such an approach may get around the problem of participants' self-bias, it cannot eliminate the problem of partiality altogether, since judges' coding may be biased towards what the experimenters hope to find. Inter-rater reliability coefficients from two judges address this problem to some degree, but unless the coders are blind to the purposes of the study, there is nonetheless a risk that the attempt to be objective will be compromised by knowing the study's aims.

Taken together, our review of the empirical literature pertaining to how generosity relates to the virtues of gratitude, compassion, forgiveness and humility offers a degree of support for our conceptual theorising that these five virtues are mutually reinforcing and form a virtue cluster that we have designated the “allocentric quintet.” As far as we know, our attempt to link conceptual analysis of the hypothesized links between the virtues in a hypothesized cluster across a range of relevant empirical studies is novel.

As we earlier noted, factor analyses of the VIA classification (McGrath, 2015; Macdonald et al., 2008; Shryack et al., 2010; McGrath & Walker, 2015; McGrath et al., in press) have revealed clusters of character strengths. Though factor analysis identifies the clusters on the basis of mathematical relations rather than conceptual analysis, such research is relevant to the current project. It shows that virtues form clusters, which often, though not always, map onto those brought to light by conceptual analysis.

## Conclusion

This paper has had two main interrelated aims. The first is to propose a novel conceptual analysis of the “unity” of the virtues in the character of a person. We have defended the thesis that virtues come in clusters or systems that are differentiated from one another by their broad

functions within the person's overall character. That is, like the discrete but interdependent systems that go to make up a healthy functioning body, the systems of virtues sustain and exploit one another in a healthy functioning character. We have identified three such systems or clusters of virtues — the virtues of intelligent caring, the virtues of willpower, and the virtues of humility. The virtues within a cluster are “unified” by some commonality. For example, the virtues of justice, compassion, sense of duty, truthfulness, and generosity, among others, constitute a cluster because they all are kinds of intelligent caring. The allocentric virtues, a sub-class of the virtues of intelligent caring, are all forms of intelligent caring *about people* (and perhaps other sentient creatures). The virtues of willpower are all capacities or abilities to manage impulses in the form of desires, emotions, and habits. The virtues of humility are all absences of the various vices of pride. These kinds or systems of virtues support and exploit one another in a healthy character.

The second main aim of this paper has been to explore whether, and if so how, empirical psychology can function as support for conceptual analysis of the kind that we are proposing. Our discussion of the conceptual analysis and empirical studies of the relations between pairs of virtues in the allocentric quintet has served to illustrate this exploration.

In bringing conceptual analysis of the relations among five virtues alongside empirical research on their relations to one another, we have found a degree of empirical support for

our claims about how these qualities are intimately related to one another and mutually reinforcing. However, we have recognized that such studies face methodological limitations. One major problem is that conclusions about relationships between enduring dispositions, such as the virtues of forgivingness and generosity, are based on temporarily induced states. A second and no less important issue concerns how well even those temporarily induced states correspond to states of virtues that appear in moral agents in the course of their lives. A third problem is that our conceptual analysis of the “unity” of virtues suggests that virtues intertwine in ways that may preclude, in practice, isolating them from one another in the way that existing studies sometimes attempt to do. And finally, our analysis of the virtue of humility suggests the importance of keeping an eye on related vices.

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